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ABSTRACT

Acts and characteristics of teachers of American Indian students which may influence the dynamics of the self-fulfilling prophecy were examined. Data were collected via questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were sent to 60 student teachers and teacher assistants in schools enrolling Indian students. Some of these schools had almost entirely Indian students; others had mixed populations. The 52 respondents made observations about the teachers in the schools in which they taught. The questionnaire included questions about differential treatment of students by levels of performance, ethnicity, and family income; the nature of the socio-emotional climate in student-teacher exchanges; the criteria used by teachers in making initial assessments of students' potential; evaluations of effective and ineffective teachers; and the existence of the self-fulfilling prophecy in the classroom. Twenty interviews were conducted with some of the same student teachers and a new group of student teachers to probe for the factors and processes which affected student-teacher relations in school and illustrated the dynamics of the self-fulfilling prophecy. Findings included: 63% of the student teachers felt that teachers reacted to and treated "good" students differently than "bad" students; "poor" students were more likely to receive control treatment, to get more punishment and less praise for their work, and to be passed over in question and answer sessions; and Indian students were more likely to be perceived as "poor" performers. (NQ)

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# PYGMALION IN NATIVE-INDIAN EDUCATION

Wayne L. Larson

The literature on the self-fulfilling prophecy is vast and varied in content, however, very little work has been done on this research question with Native-American students. If the research which has been done on students of different backgrounds were used to make predictions about the presence or absence of the self-fulfilling prophecy in Indian education, a prediction of its presence would be reasonable because students of low socioeconomic status or minority status have been reported frequently as recipients of stereotyped labelling, (Rist, 1970; Rosenthal, 1973). One analysis of teachers' expectations, (Gilchrist and Larson, 1975) indicated that teachers' expectations were influenced by ethnicity regardless of the control variables introduced to explain variation in teachers' expectations. Yet, that paper or other literature on Indian education has not explicated the dynamic link between teachers' labelling and Indian students' responses to the labels. This paper is an attempt to specify some of the acts and characteristics of teachers of Indian students which may become a part of the dynamics of the self-fulfilling prophecy.

The data for this paper were collected by two different techniques. In the first stage of the research questionnaires were sent to 60 student teachers some of whom were student teachers and others were assistants to teachers. They were placed in schools in which Indian students were enrolled. Some of these schools were almost entirely composed of Indian students; others had mixed populations. There were 52 responses to the questionnaire, 34 student teachers and 15 assistants and 3 who acted in both capacities. In this paper they will be treated as one group of respondents making observations about the teachers in the schools in which they taught. The questionnaire included questions about differential treatment of students by levels of performance, ethnicity, and family income,

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the nature of the socioemotional climate in student-teacher exchanges, the criteria used by teachers in making initial assessments of students' potential, evaluations of effective and ineffective teachers, and the existence of the self-fulfilling prophecy in the classroom.

In the second stage, some of these same student teachers and a new group of student teachers were interviewed in depth in order to probe for the factors and processes which affected student-teacher relations in school and also illustrated the dynamics of the self-fulfilling prophecy. Twenty interviews were conducted with student teachers in the college in which they were enrolled after they had returned from their assignments as student teachers or assistants to teachers. These interviews were semi-structured, i.e., a similar set of questions were asked of all interviewees. I will attempt to glean from their answers the typical or most common feelings about Indian education, and note in passing minority views on a particular subject. They were told prior to being interviewed that no names would be mentioned and if they wished to speak on a subject which they did not wish to have recorded to request that the recorder be turned off. With the exception of one interview which revealed nothing of value, the atmosphere seemed to be one of openness and interest in the subject. These student teachers and assistants were highly motivated and seemed to be very excited about their experiences and dedicated to being "good" teachers. They did not appear to be "do-gooders" or "dewey-eyed liberals" out to save Indians from the ravages of modern civilization. Their major concern was with the teaching role and how one could be effective in any classroom, not just with the classroom in which Indian students were enrolled.

The first step in the self-fulfilling prophecy is the initial assessment of students made by teachers, e.g., how do they determine if a student has high or low potential for performance? The important question in this first step is what criteria are used in making these assessments. Respondents in the questionnaire

phase of the study were given a list of eight criteria to check. If a criterion was used by teachers in assessing potential, they were asked if it had an effect on the teachers treatment of students and how much effect it had. Two of the criteria would seem to support the accusation of bias toward students in the literature--race or ethnicity and socioeconomic status. These were used in the study. A ranking of these criteria from high to low by the mean score of effect on teachers' relations with students is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Ranking of criteria used by teachers in making initial assessments of student potential by mean scores on the effect of this assessment on teacher's relations with students.

| CRITERIA | EFFECT | | | | MEAN | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | STRONG % | MODERATE % | WEAK % | NONE | | |
| Conforming behavior in the classroom | 35 | 41 | 4 | 20 | 2.90 | 49 |
| Deviant behavior in or out of classroom | 29 | 45 | 8 | 18 | 2.84 | 49 |
| Reports from students' former teachers | 10 | 29 | 21 | 40 | 2.10 | 48 |
| G.P.A. | 6 | 29 | 16 | 49 | 1.92 | 49 |
| Scores on standardized tests | 4 | 20 | 24 | 52 | 1.76 | 50 |
| Opinions about a students' friends in school | 11 | 11 | 19 | 60 | 1.72 | 47 |
| Race or ethnicity of students | 13 | 4 | 9 | 74 | 1.57 | 47 |
| Personal appearance of students | 10 | 8 | 6 | 75 | 1.54 | 47 |

Two criteria stand out, conforming and deviant behavior, followed by reports from student's former teacher. Neither of these criteria, on the surface lead to "rational" predictions about performance, although one might argue that deviant behavior is an indicator of lack of interest or motivation in school work. These data are supportive of the inference by some writers in education that one of the main goals of the schools is to socialize students to prefer conformity, order and obedience over their counterparts, (Gracey, 1967). Why was deviance so important in the assessment process? Most student teachers saw deviance as a widespread problem in the schools. Their interpretations of the causes of the problem varied from "a problem in the home not the school" to "a way of expressing that something is wrong with the system." The majority of respondents commenting on this question said that teachers were very concerned about deviance in the classroom and typically responded either with punishment or a "search" for the cause of deviance. They also indicated that teachers did not hold grudges against deviants; they forgot about it by the next day and seldom carried their feelings outside of the classroom. A comment by one respondent reflects the general nature of the comments about obedience. He believed that "the whole school system was organized around obedience . . . students are judged according to how well they behave." Other researchers have reported this concern for conformity, (Good and Dembo, 1973). Related comments associated conformity with high motivation, good students and expected or appropriate behavior. Yet, several recognized that the lack of order in the classroom contributed to inability to create a learning situation and to students taking advantage of the teachers. We had hoped to get some insights into why conformity and deviance were ranked so high as measures of potential from the interviewees. A typical response was, "I don't know.", or, "You must have obedience and order to carry out classroom objectives each day." A few suggested that deviance stands out more clearly than any other criterion

used in assessments. A possible interpretation of the findings from the questionnaire would be the idea of "kindergarten as boot camp." A typical discussion of this idea has not addressed the question of why teachers act as if classrooms were established as conditioners designed to insure order, obedience and conformity as behavioral outcomes for students. One possible reason may be that they have experienced similar situations and are merely imitating the models to which they have been exposed. Another possibility is that pressure was placed on them to maintain orderly classrooms, and the evaluation of their performance was based partially on that criterion. One consequence of the emphasis on conformity might be that potential talent is passed over because of this concern. This was reflected in comments by several student teachers. They hypothesized that "deviant behavior by students might be a reaction to the kinds of things going on in the classes," i.e., the subject matter was not relevant, or it was boring and not perceived as related to their future plans or goals, consequently they responded with deviant acts.

Although personal appearance ranked low, it was not ignored by all teachers. The following comments are illustrative of their concern. "She hated them because they were dirty but didn't say it to the students." "Sloppy dress meant a problem and a poor student." "Students she disliked the most had poor personal appearance." "[She] commented in a derogatory way about the smell and appearance and how parents didn't take care of their kids." "He was offended by sloppy appearance." A few of the respondents commented that students dressed the same so there was no basis for differentiating between them. Others suggested that there were differences but it did not affect the relations between students and teachers.

A common response to the criterion of "reports from students' former teachers" was "that it was considered in assessment but had little effect, or it worked in positive and negative ways."

Race or ethnicity, per se, was not as important a factor in assessments as we might have expected, but "Indianness" was, as will be reinforced by the responses of the interviewees. The comments on this question ranged from "very few prejudices against Indians" to "most teachers [were] prejudiced toward Indians in a negative way" or "hated Indians and therefore obviously treated Indians differently." It was clear that the majority of teachers fell into the former rather than the latter type of teacher.

Standardized scores were not as important as some student teachers thought they should have been, particularly the failure in some cases to pinpoint weaknesses in English. The common or typical explanation for the lack of use of tests was they they believed that many students were scoring below average on them, therefore, they didn't differentiate among students. Others saw them as invalid indicators of a student's true potential.

Given these findings on the criteria used in assessment of students' potential, did student teachers see the self-fulfilling prophecy operating in their schools. They were asked to indicate if teachers differentiated between "good" and "poor" teachers in their interactions with them. Sixty-three percent of the student teachers thought that teachers reacted to and treated "good" students differently than "bad" students. Forty-two percent said this occurred infrequently, 15 percent said frequently, and 6 percent thought it took place very frequently. Those students who reported that it occurred "very frequently" or "frequently" were asked to comment on this dimension of student-teacher relations.

Their comments on the way in which teachers reacted differently were grouped into four categories based on Robert Rosenthal's (1973) classification of the dimensions of the self-fulfilling prophecy. The first dimension is the climate in student-teacher relations (warmth, attention, and emotional support versus their respective bipolar opposites). Warmth was used in relations with top

students, e.g., hugging, whereas the "poor" students were the recipients of frowns, raised voices, stern commands, and yelling. Only one student indicated that Indian students were treated differently. She said, "She only hugged white students, never the Indians."

The second category was the kind of feedback which students gave teachers, e.g., whether the teacher ignored or recognized students attempts to provide feedback. There was a tendency to comment with praise for "good" students and to withhold or ignore feedback with "poor" students. Some teachers yelled at "poor" students in class and humilated them in front of the class. The evidence, however, for a preponderance of praise for "good" students and criticism of "poor" students was not confirmed by their responses to this question. Most teachers gave frequent feedback and concentrated on praise rather than punishment. Therefore, differentiation between students was not common by type of feedback.

The third category (input factor) is the opportunity structure for student responses, i.e., the extent to which all students get an opportunity to answer or ask questions. There was little evidence to indicate there was more opportunity for "good" students. Only a few said that teachers "relied on smarter students to ask questions," and one said, "If a poor student didn't know the answer, she went right on to the next student, but she waited for 'good' students to answer if they hesitated."

Interviewees were asked identical questions about the dimensions of the self-fulfilling prophecy. Only one of these, input, or teachers' expectations revealed a high degree of consensus, teachers had relatively lower expectations for Indian students, and low expectations for students in general. The low expectations for Indian students was attributed to the stereotyping of Indians, i.e., they were considered apathetic and indifferent to education.

In summary, the differential treatment of students was not widespread. This

is an expected outcome because questionnaire data indicated that only a minority of teachers would act this way. These student teachers and assistants did note some differential treatment. "Poor" students were more likely to receive control treatment, to get more punishment and less praise for their work, and to be passed over in question and answer sessions in the classroom. These findings are consistent with Rosenthal's conclusions about teacher expectations and the self-fulfilling prophecy. Indian students were more likely than non-Indian students to be perceived as "poor" performers.

Interviewees were also asked a direct question about the self-fulfilling prophecy in Indian education. They were asked if they were familiar with the concept. If they were familiar did it operate in their school? If it operated in their school, how did it operate? There were several ways in which the teachers conveyed their impressions of students. For example, they communicated their feelings or perceptions by facial or body gestures (disgust or surprise), by allocating more or less time to students in their work, by verbal comments such as expressions of surprise that a particular student could do adequate or superior work, by not giving them materials or supplies to do their work because it was a waste of resources, by not calling on particular students and punishing them more frequently, and by putting them into ability groupings.

Although stereotyping of Indians as "poor" was not considered a widespread phenomenon, there was almost unanimous support that some teachers engaged in stereotyping of Indian students and their parents. There were strong feelings that Indian parents did not care about education. The evidence for this belief was the failure of Indian parents to attend PTA meetings or to initiate contacts with school personnel unless it was for disciplinary reasons. A few interviewees said that non-Indian parents were not too involved in the education of their children, but some said they were more involved. According to their reports relations were

not hostile between teachers and parents nor did they reach conflict stages. An example of the feelings of some teachers was the comment by a student that, "Teachers felt parents didn't care, I mean not at all." If an Indian parent was involved, it was typically the parent whose child was doing well in the school. A few student teachers felt that Indian parents didn't reinforce the values of education and one indicated that he thought parents actually undermined the efforts of teachers to instill the importance of education. In general the response to the question, how would you characterize the relations between teachers and Indian parents, the reply was "poor," "nil," or "not close." Since these reports are based on the observation of attendance of Indian parents at PTA or teacher-parent conferences and not on parental reports, the data do not establish the presence of apathy or indifference of Indian parents. My own research on Indian students revealed that Indian parents were just as interested and concerned as non-Indian parents according to the reports of Indian students. These findings do, however, suggest that if teachers define Indian parents as disinterested, when in fact they are interested, the consequences for the educational process are probably harmful and should be explored by all interested parties in this process.

After establishing that there were some differences between teachers and their relations with Indian students, respondents to the questionnaire were asked if they knew any teachers who had high expectations for students with low standardized test scores or grades (31 percent said they knew of such cases). Conversely they were asked if they knew teachers who had low expectations for students who had high standardized test scores or grades (42 percent said they knew of such cases). How did they explain these apparent contradictions in expectations? In the case of low expectations for high scores or grades, the most likely comment was that they (Indians) behaved as a group. Some student teachers used this as an explanation. One said, for example, "Some teachers actually believed that Indians were inherently

stupid and lazy and were not really capable of learning anything besides the basics, if that much." Or, another said, "Indian students were basically unable to learn." One explained the contradictory expectations by listing the characteristics of students which contributed to them, e.g., repeated patterns of nonattendance or tardiness, turning in assignments late, and lack of interest in education. Another interviewee said that, "In certain cases people did not expect a fulfilled potential from an Indian student--too many had seen the dropout situation and in some cases felt it was useless to attempt to succeed in the white world." If they were discussing a particular student rather than Indian students they said such things as, "The child had a brilliant mind but was rebellious and defiant and the teachers tried to get him kicked out of school." In the case of high expectations for students with low standardized test scores or grades, the explanations were diverse. No one statement typifies their responses. Some examples to illustrate the diversity may be instructive. "Some teachers doubted the reliability of standardized tests...." "The student had potential but the teacher indicated the family had a reputation as trouble makers." "Many teachers that I have come in contact with have high expectations for low achievers." "Maybe they feel they can work miracles." "Yes, the father of the child was superintendent of the school." "The teacher believed in the self-fulfilling prophecy."

The findings and comments from these two sets of questions gave some support for the inference of the presence of a self-fulfilling prophecy. It must, however, be considered potential rather than actual because these are the perceptions of observers and we have no independent measures of the effect of teachers expectations. Yet, their comments on the questions about teacher expectations clearly reveal the use of labels and stereotyping, i.e., the label or stereotype of inability to learn. Previous work by the author in an unpublished study of teachers of Indian students revealed similar patterns of perceptions. Those teachers perceived Indian

students as less motivated, interested and prone to behavioral nonconformity in the classroom or school. The inferences above apply to a minority of the teachers in the schools, but it may be that a minority of a teaching staff is sufficient to create a climate of student-teacher relations which contributes to the negative cycle of the self-fulfilling prophecy, or hopefully, and conversely the positive cycle.

These definitions of the educational situation by student teachers and assistants denoted problems of effectiveness in accomplishing educational objectives by some teachers. How could effectiveness be improved in the schools in which they were placed? Two forms of responses relate to that question. First, they were asked to indicate the qualities of effective and ineffective teachers of Indian students. Second, they were asked to make recommendations for teachers and educational programs.

The findings from the first question probably differ very little from findings of teacher effectiveness in studies of teachers in any school and in schools with diverse populations of students. The effective teacher of Indian students was seen as one who, in order of importance, was understanding, competent, enthusiastic, patient, sensitive and warm. Being demanding and tough were seen as qualities of ineffectiveness when effective teachers were being evaluated on a list of descriptive bipolar adjectives. Indian students in a study by Larson (1971) ranked helping and understanding, expertise and concern for the student as a person as the most important characteristic of a good teacher. They felt that treating them as a person rather than as a member of a class was an essential ingredient to congenial and productive student-teacher relations. Kleinfeld (1972) found that the warm but demanding teacher was most effective in working with native Eskimo and Indian students in Alaska. A reasonable assumption about effective teaching may be that warmth and understanding should precede the demanding behavior of teachers,

particularly in first contacts between students and teachers.

The ineffective teacher was seen as one who, in order of importance, was tense, impatient, insensitive, cold, authoritarian, not understanding, closed and impersonal. Tenseness was clearly the most important indicator of ineffectiveness. It is possible, as Kleinfeld (1972) has suggested that teachers feelings are conveyed by tense and anxious expressions. Thus, a relaxed and casual climate may be essential to a supportive learning relationship between students and teachers especially to those students who are not committed to or concerned with the educational objectives of the teacher.

As a check on the findings from the questionnaire, interviewees were asked to indicate if they knew any teachers in their school who were more effective or ineffective in working with Indian students than other teachers. A majority of the student teachers said that there were teachers who fit that category. They were then asked to indicate why they were perceived as more effective of ineffective. A key word which covers a number of descriptive adjectives reported for effective teachers was "openness." A paraphrasing of all the comments about this trait suggested that the term "openness" meant a willingness to listen, to be tolerant of different values and ways of life, and to be willing to understand a student's perspective. Warmth and treating students as a special person with unique qualities were two other characteristics mentioned frequently. Several English teachers and teachers of mathematics and physical education were cited for effectiveness because they cared, were personal, but most importantly, they demanded that students perform according to their individual abilities. They literally said, "You can and you must do it." According to their accounts, these characteristics as they related to behavior were responsible for improving attendance, motivation and performance of some students. They were less informative about ineffective teachers, but if they did identify one, the most typical response was that they were

prejudiced and older teachers who were just filling in time until they retired. They did not think these teachers could be changed much by teacher training programs or persuasive techniques.

When they were asked what advice they would give new teachers going into their school for the first time, the advice was very similar to the evaluation of effective teachers. Even more emphasis was placed on being open and patient and trying to understand the way things are or work in the community. As important as that advice was the admonition to mix in with the community, e.g., to visit with people in town, attend school events, and community affairs. Almost all of them when asked the question, What will be the reaction of a new teacher coming to this school for the first time?, said, "They will be shocked, disappointed, confused, and saddened." Their advice to new teachers, in addition to being open, was to start slowly, gain the confidence and respect of students first and then begin to place demands on them according to their respective abilities.

The easy recommendation, and one advocated by several interviewees, to improve the relations between students and teachers was to hire teachers with those characteristics associated with effectiveness. Common sense tells us that changes in behavioral traits do not come easy, particularly they do not change with verbal instructions or commands. For example, by telling them: Do not be tense, cold and impersonal. Be understanding, warm and competent. Even if we change the behavior of teachers with the proper reinforcement, if the behavior of students does not change in response to teachers new actions it may be a short term change in teachers' behavior. The point I am trying to stress is that we cannot isolate the teacher, look at his or her qualities or actions, focus on changing them and then expect a miracle. The teacher is imbedded in a network of interaction among peers, superordinates, parents, students and members of the school board and community. A comment from a student teacher is relevant to the point. He said, "You can have

the most expert and motivated teacher but if they [students] don't care, nothing is going to happen. . . and parents don't care, kids don't care." If we change the teacher's behavior and beliefs about students but do not get the desired outcomes from students we must concentrate on students and those people who influence them to bring about the desired change. This could only occur in a "community" of interested, unselfish and caring parties involved in the educational process. An atmosphere of blaming others for results, and withdrawal when threatened with accusations by others will simply perpetuate the situation.

Teachers received the major share of blame for the problems in their schools along with students and parents, but administrators were cited as contributors to the problems. For example, they were seen by some as too slack in running the school and too lenient with some students. They believed that students took advantage of lackness and leniency. Therefore, their recommendations included a concern with order at all levels.

A common theme in their resolutions was a request for caring teachers who treated students as individuals rather than as members of a class. Yet, they recognized the difficulty of maintaining a caring attitude over an extended period of time. One of them said about teachers in the school, "Teachers lowered their standards because they grew tired of trying to excite students who were completely apathetic to education." But they had also heard comments from teachers such as, "Well, you know how those Indians are," and, "Don't be too upset if they don't learn anything." They also recognized the problem of peer pressure. They could see the way in which some teachers defined the situation and tried to persuade new teachers to accept their definitions. Other recommendations were to:

1. provide teacher training in Indian culture and social organization;
2. encourage teachers to become involved with students and their parents after school hours or outside the classroom;

3. let the students know what is expected of them;

4. provide more information on the possibilities for students' futures;

5. make the subject matter more relevant;

6. improve their self concepts by whatever technique that works; and,

7. provide love, trust and friendship to break the barriers that have been established between the two cultures.

It seems to me that most of their recommendations could be initiated and implemented at a very low cost to the school district and may produce the intended result. At least it would be a beginning in those schools which are not already engaging in the programs suggested by their recommendations. For those schools which have practiced and are practicing their recommendations, the data suggest that a renewed effort may be necessary because a minority of teachers are still committed to stereotypes of Indian students.

These apprentices in the teaching profession are, like most young people, idealistic and relatively inexperienced in the reality of everyday life in schools. Yet, they may provide insights which are difficult to observe and accept as an insider to the educational process, a major reason for selecting them as subjects in this study. Most heartening to me was their willingness to come back and teach in these schools because they knew the difficulties they would face in being successful in their chosen occupation.

A customary ending to a paper such as this is to pontificate about the nature of education, schooling, teachers, students and the educational process, and then to give sage advice to change the situation. Tradition will be ignored. The students' comments speak for themselves. I will simply close with a quotation from a paper by Robert Rosenthal (1973).

> Science is wonderful, I feel sure. But it is sometimes not more than a verification of poetry, of things that poets know, or of things always known by people like poets (storytellers, essayists, village nuts, eccentrics) who went around muttering truths about school teaching; if you smile at a student he will learn more than if you beat him with a stick; or, consider the girl on her merits apart from your memory of her older sister. Give confidence. Have patience. Teaching is a form of loving.

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